

# Russian



# Revolution

## **AOS1: Revolutionary Ideas, Leaders, Movements and Events**

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Key individuals such as Trotsky and Lenin and parties such as the SRs.

The Civil War, War Communism, the Cheka.

The role of Trotsky and the Red Army.

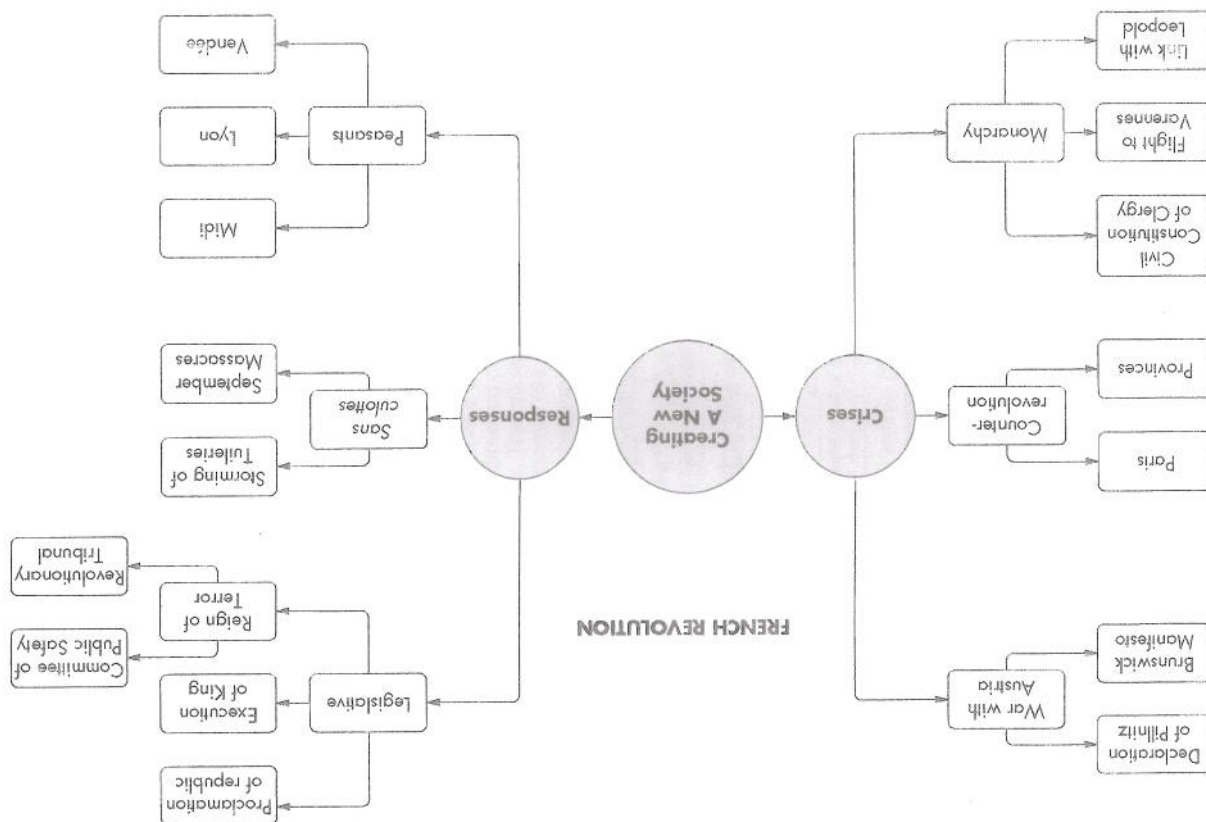
Increasing centralisation and control. 'On Party Unity', the 10th Party Congress.

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The NEP, impact and results.

The death of Lenin and ensuing leadership style.

## 2. Creating a new society



## Cram Notes: The Russian Revolution

These Cram Notes summarise key concepts and content for the Russian Revolution, following the requirements of each Area of Study in the VCAA Study Design. Use them to help revise your knowledge and understanding of what will be tested in the external exam.

### Overview

In the early 1900s Russia was a country ripe for political revolution. Clinging to a semi-medieval autocracy, bolstered by the powerful Russian Orthodox Church and feudal social structure, Tsarism as a system of government was extremely outdated. Russian tsars had ruled over their empire through a mishmash of personality, idolatry, superstition, secrecy, oppression and violence. Economic reforms in Russia in the 1890s were not matched by political reforms; some Russians wanted political representation but found Nicholas II unwilling to share his sovereignty. The reforms of 1905 seemed to deliver these long-desired changes but they were a sham. World War One again highlighted the inadequacies of the regime and the need for revolution. But did it have to be a *socialist revolution*?

The year 1917 was to become the great crossroad in Russian history. At that point, the nation might have tentatively moved forward into parliamentary democracy, under a constitutional monarch or a republican head of state. Instead, amid the savagery and strain of World War One, a more radical form of government was to emerge, undermining more moderate attempts at reform and appealing to those classes long neglected under the old regime. The Bolsheviks were Russia's most extreme socialist revolutionary group but also the most organised and determined – in October 1917 they overthrew the baseless Provisional Government and embarked upon their plan to restructure Russia along socialist lines. Few elsewhere in the world expected the Bolshevik regime to succeed; many foreign governments, as well as groups inside Russia, actively worked to ensure that it would fail. The new regime faced considerable opposition that forced it to compromise and change its ideals, betray its origins and act in similar ways to the Tsarist regime that it replaced.

In your own writing about the Russian Revolution, refrain from absolute statements, such as 'the Russian Revolution failed' or preconceptions, such as 'communism does not work': analysis requires an open mind and a consideration that all revolutions and ideologies are unique to the settings in which they occur. It is undeniable that while Lenin and the Bolsheviks set out to create a better society, they created only limited improvements, and at great cost: war, famine, terror, violence and denial of freedoms. However, this was not wholly due to flawed ideology but also to other conditions, circumstances and opposition. Understanding the complexity of Bolshevik ideas, obstacles and responses will give you a stronger grasp of the revolution generally and allow you to more capably assess the outcomes of the new regime.

See page 62 for a Glossary of Terms specific to the Russian Revolution.

Before 1918 Russia used the Julian, or Old Style, calendar while the rest of Europe used the Gregorian, or New Style, calendar. All dates given in these Cram Notes on the Russian Revolution are Julian calendar dates, unless otherwise specified. These dates are thirteen days behind Gregorian calendar dates. Readers should also be aware that the Russian capital, Saint Petersburg, changed its name to Petrograd in 1914.



## 1. Revolutionary ideas, leaders, movements and events

The central question of this Area of Study is simple: Why did the Russian Revolution happen? The answer, however, is quite complicated. This half of the course asks you not only to understand the various reasons why the revolution occurred, but more interestingly, to decide which ones you consider to be the most significant. The Study Design outlines several important factors that you are expected to grasp, each of which will be analysed in the sections below: causes of tensions and conflicts, ideas utilised in revolutionary struggle, and the roles of revolutionary individuals and groups.

### Chronology of key events

Date	Event	Significance
January 1905	• 'Bloody Sunday' – massacre of protestors by troops	• This showed Tsarist indifference to social and economic problems, a refusal to reform and a willingness to commit acts of unmitigated violence against the people.
May 1905	• Defeat at the Battle of Tsushima in south-east Asia	• An embarrassing defeat at the hands of an Asian power, with almost complete destruction of the fleet; the Tsarist regime lost credibility.
January–November 1905	• 1905 revolution	• There was widespread unrest, strikes, rioting and mutinies. • An overthrow of the Tsarist order appeared imminent.
October 1905	• St Petersburg Soviet formed by Trotsky	• Trotsky created a body representing workers and soldiers.
October 1905	• October Manifesto issued by the Tsar	• This highlighted Trotsky's role as a key revolutionary figure. • On advice from Witte, the Tsar agreed to legal, civil and political reforms; the most significant of these was a representative parliament (Duma).
April 1906	• Tsar issued the Fundamental Laws	• Intended to function as a constitution, the Laws failed to implement the full reforms promised in the Manifesto; the Tsar's sovereignty over the Duma is maintained.
May–July 1906	• First Duma sat and was then prorogued (closed) by the Tsar	• This demonstrated that the Tsar would exercise his authority to dissolve the Duma if it dissented or contravened his rule.
October 1906	• Stolypin's land reforms/response to opposition	• The second Duma (1907) also only lasted three months. • Stolypin cancelled peasant redemption payments and allowed private land ownership, to enhance peasant loyalty to the regime. • This was coupled with brutal oppression of political dissidents.
August 1914	• World War One started • Russia entered on the side of the Allies	• A surge of patriotism and 'war fever' put a temporary end to opposition and revolutionary activity; however, early defeats at Tannenberg showed Russian troops were ill-prepared and poorly led.
September 1915	• Tsar took personal command of military operations	• The Tsar was now personally associated with continued defeats, while domestic matters were controlled by the German-born Tserina, who was in league with Rasputin.
1916–17	• Long involvement in the war caused social and economic chaos	• Inflation skyrocketed, food was scarce, and the transportation system collapsed. • Revolutionary discussion and activity rose, mutinies in the military increased.
February 1917	• Mutinies and bread riots sparked the February revolution	• The Tsar was overthrown and arrested, while elements of the Duma assumed control as the Provisional Government. • 300 years of Romanov rule came to an end.
March/April 1917	• Petrograd Soviet issued 'Order Number 1' • Lenin returned from exile	• The Soviet order suggested non-compliance with Provisional Government policy, weakening the position of the government. • Lenin called for immediate socialist revolution on his return, signalling a new phase of Bolshevik agitation.
July/August 1917	• July Days and the Kornilov revolt	• Bolsheviks attempted revolution in July but failed due to lack of support. • An Attempted counter-revolution by General Kornilov weakened the Provisional Government's position.
October 1917	• Bolshevik revolution in Petrograd	• After gaining a majority in the Soviets, the Bolsheviks felt confident enough to attempt another takeover. They did so with comparative ease, thanks to Trotsky's organisation.

## The causes of tensions and conflicts within the old regime

### Political tensions and conflicts

- In 1905, Tsarist Russia was the only true autocracy remaining among the major nations of Europe; most had long since developed some form of democratic parliament, ministerial autonomy or constitutional limits on royal power.
- Following the assassination of Alexander II in 1881, Russia had undergone a period of reaction and counter-reform under Alexander III, Nicholas II's father. Like his father, Nicholas was a firm believer in autocracy, although he was not a strong character and often showed a lack of interest in governing, preferring to spend time with his family.
- The repressive nature of Tsarist Russia was a constant source of motivation for revolutionaries: it was essentially a police state, with the Okhrana (secret police) engaged in surveillance, extra-legal punishments, kidnapping and arbitrary executions. Russia had been a 'closed society', closely controlled and monitored with censorship of education and the press firmly in place.
- The Provisional Government came to power in February 1917 but was not able to attain or consolidate a strong position. The February revolution was a popular uprising that was *against* Tsarism but it was not necessarily for an alternative government; the Provisional Government therefore assumed power by default rather than by popular support.
- The role of the Soviets was critical in undermining the Provisional Government; the period between February and October 1917 is often known as the 'dual power' because of this. The Petrograd Soviet issued *Soviet Order Number 1* in March 1917 stating that the Soviet must approve all military orders; this undermined the capacity of the Provisional Government to conduct the war and govern Russia.

### Economic tensions and conflicts

- Tsarist Russia was distinctly unequal in its distribution of wealth: royalty, the aristocracy, the land-owners, professional middle-classes and the Russian Orthodox Church possessed great wealth and income, while the peasants and industrial workers had little and often worked and lived in appalling conditions.
- Rapid industrialisation and modernisation in the 1890s caused dramatic economic and social changes. Initiated by chief minister Sergei Witte, important industries, engineering projects and new transportation infrastructure were created, funded mainly with loans and investment from abroad. This led to the formation of an industrial workforce as peasants flocked to the cities seeking employment in the new factories.
- Short-term economic factors, brought about by three years of involvement in World War One, finally led to the disintegration of Tsarism as a political force (see 'Fluctuations in economic activity' below).

### Social tensions and conflicts

- Working conditions were a critical issue for those employed in industry and factories, mainly in the cities. These conditions sparked the strikes and unrest of 1905. With no legislative limits on employers, workers could be ordered to complete days of eleven hours or more, working from dawn to night.
- Workers lived in ramshackle tenements provided by factory owners, often with several families living in one or two rooms. Working conditions were usually unsafe: many workers were killed by machines or injury, while others caught diseases in workplaces that were often freezing and unhygienic. There were no holidays and no sick pay; if workers could not work they were simply replaced.
- Employers often implemented a series of costly fines or salary deductions, to be imposed on workers arbitrarily. These might be for low productivity, time-wasting or for trivial behaviour, such as whistling while working.



## Rising and unfulfilled class expectations

The creation and growth of new classes is often an integral cause of revolution. These emerging classes develop social and political ambitions or demand economic improvements that cannot or will not be accommodated by the old regime.

### The industrial working-class

- Russia's underdeveloped economy in the nineteenth century had little industrial production; consequently there were few industrial workers, and urban population density was low in comparison to the rest of Europe.
- Economic reforms led by chief minister Witte in the 1890s invited foreign investment into Russia as part of a state-controlled program of modernisation. These changes saw thousands of former peasants move to the cities to take up work in the new factories and industries. Both urban population density and the number of industrial workers rose significantly in the next two decades. These workers had to endure atrocious conditions both in the workplace and in factory-provided tenement housing.
- This close living enabled dissent and discussion of reform and revolution to form and circulate more easily than it could among the scattered peasantry. Whereas revolutionary ideas didn't 'travel' well in rural areas and among superstitious peasants, the cities, factories and tenements were a more receptive breeding ground for dissent and radicalism.
- The petition carried by Father Gapon, on behalf of industrial workers, at the 'Bloody Sunday' procession expressed a need for social and economic reforms.

### The professional middle classes

- The modernisation of Russia that started in the late 1800s gave birth to new affluent middle classes, including: factory owners and managers, merchants and business owners, lawyers, white-collar workers, mid-ranking bureaucrats and, generally speaking, those who were educated.
- Although not a unified group, the middle classes generally favoured liberal reforms rather than radical changes; many wanted political representation to match their wealth and status in the workforce, so strongly supported the idea of a constitutional monarchy with an elected parliament.
- These middle classes, along with several liberal aristocrats, became the supporter base of liberal-conservative groups, such as the Kadets and Octobrists.

## Fluctuations in economic activity

- The economic state of Russia during the pre-revolutionary period (1890–1917) was one of rapid modernisation and growth, yet the nation remained well behind the rest of Europe in many aspects. Some historians suggest that the rate of change in Russia may have been too fast, creating subsequent pressures on the social and political orders that they could not accommodate or cope with.
- The economic impact of World War One was critical in creating a revolutionary situation, as it placed great strain on the political regime and caused widespread fissures in the social structure. The movement of men to the war front caused labour shortages, which reduced food production. In 1916 Russia's transport infrastructure collapsed, mainly because of low morale and a shortage of workers, and food was not able to reach the cities in sufficient quantity.
- The most significant outcome of these events was a sharp reduction in the availability of food, especially in the cities. The value of the rouble slumped with inflation climbing to almost 400 per cent. Shortages of food, particularly bread, led to protests and riots in Petrograd and Moscow. When the February revolution occurred, it was sparked by a series of bread riots. Petrograd's soldiers were ordered to use force to suppress these riots, but instead took part in them, signalling the military's declining loyalty to the Tsar.

## Failed attempts at economic, social or political reform

- The most significant political reform was the creation of the Duma by the October Manifesto, 1905, easing demands for representation by liberal groups such as the Kadets and moderate socialists. It seemed that Russia might head down the path to constitutional monarchy. But the Fundamental Laws of 1906 (effectively Russia's first constitution) signalled the Tsar's intention to retain all political sovereignty and authority. The Duma failed initially because it made radical demands, including: land reform and reallocation, constitutional limits on the Tsar, free education for all, and a progressive and more equitable tax system. The first two dumas were prorogued by the Tsar, whose ministers then manipulated electoral laws so that subsequent dumas would be less radical in their demands.
- A series of social and economic reforms, formulated by chief minister Petr Stolypin, were agreed to by the Tsar in response to the disorder and the threat of revolution in 1905. As part of these reforms the maximum working-day was shortened, laws restricting child labour were introduced, a progressive taxation system was introduced, compulsory primary education was implemented and there was increased spending on health and welfare.
- Coupled with the more positive reforms was a crackdown on revolutionary groups: Okhrana surveillance was stepped up, executions increased and many figures like Lenin and Trotsky were forced into exile.
- These changes did decrease revolutionary activity and render revolutionary groups less popular, creating a period of relative calm between 1906 and 1912. Strikes decreased over this period; however, dissent was revived in 1912 after Tsarist police shot over 200 striking gold miners on the Lena River in Siberia.
- Almost 1.5 million Russian workers went on strike over conditions in the first months of 1914, despite Russia's improving economy, with its high level of growth, exports and government spending. The outbreak of World War One prompted a new rush of patriotism, bringing about a sudden decrease in anti-Tsarist feeling and revolutionary activity, albeit temporarily.

## The impact of war or economic crisis that contributed to revolution

War was integral to the formation, progress and outcomes of revolution in Russia. Two wars served to embarrass, undermine and weaken both the political authority of the Tsarist regime and the fast-growing but fragile Russian economy.

### The Russo-Japanese War, 1904–05

- Pre-revolutionary Russia, like some of its European counterparts, was an empire rather than a nation: it was made up of many regions which contained people not of Russian ethnicity. Nicholas II, despite his reluctance to rule, still had imperial ambitions to expand Russia.
- Russian troops had marched into Manchuria in the 1890s, competing with the fast-modernising Japanese Empire for influence and trade in China and Korea. Nicholas effectively provoked the Japanese into war, believing their military to be ill-equipped and unable to cope with Russian forces.
- Despite Russia's numerical advantage, it faced two significant problems: the war was in the distant eastern sphere, so reinforcements took weeks to arrive on the Trans-Siberian railway; and most of Russia's naval strength was anchored in the Baltic. The decision was made to send the Baltic Fleet on the long voyage to Asia, half a world away.
- Sending the Baltic Fleet to Asia was a catastrophic failure. The fleet almost provoked a war with England shortly after setting out, by firing on fishing boats in the English Channel in October 1904. Rounding Africa and crossing the Indian Ocean, the fleet arrived in the Tsushima Straits near Korea in May 1905 and was ambushed by a smaller but faster flotilla of Japanese ships. Most of the Russian fleet was sunk, including all eight battleships.



- Following on from several land defeats, the Battle of Tsushima proved disastrous for both Russian military credibility and the leadership of the Tsar and his generals. With the 1905 'revolution' by now in full swing, the Russians elected to sue for peace rather than continue the war, which marked the rise of Japan as a military power in Asia.

### World War One, 1914–18

- Russia's entry into World War One was less due to Tsarist error than the Russo-Japanese War, but proved much more costly to the nation. The Russians had pledged military support to Serbia should the Serbs be attacked, the two nations sharing Slavic ethnicity. When Serbia was menaced by Austria-Hungary in July 1914 after the assassination of the Austrian heir to the throne, Franz Ferdinand, Russia again affirmed its support for Serbia.
- Russia's support for Serbia against Austria-Hungary brought Germany, an ally of Austria-Hungary, into the fray. The Tsar hoped to avert war with Germany by private communications between himself and the German Kaiser (his cousin); however, this soon broke down. By early August 1914, Russia found itself at war with Germany and Austria-Hungary, prompting an initial rush of patriotism and affection for the Tsar.
- This was not to last, however, as Russian forces were humiliated at Tannenberg (30 000 Russian casualties, 95 000 Russians taken prisoner) and the Masurian Lakes. Russian forces lacked equipment and weaponry, while their generals were inconsistent and often incompetent. In September 1915 the Tsar took command of military operations, despite having minimal training and no combat experience.
- Domestic control was left in the hands of the Tsarina Alexandra, herself of German origin. Alexandra was devoutly religious and superstitious, and relied on advice from the debauched monk Rasputin, who infiltrated the Romanov family after he was able to ease the pain of the haemophilic Tsarevitch, Alexei. Rasputin was a noted drinker and had sexual encounters with both wealthy women and prostitutes. His association with the Romanovs gave rise to political pornography and revolutionary propaganda, diminishing the credibility and respectability of the Romanovs.
- By 1916 the war had sapped the Russian economy: inflation was running at almost 400 per cent, food was scarce due to labour shortages and peasant hoarding, most transport infrastructure had collapsed, and desertions and mutinies were increasing. With the social fabric unravelling, bread riots in February 1917 became a revolutionary protest. The Tsar was forced to abdicate after the Duma refused to obey his directives. The throne passed to Nicholas' brother who also surrendered it. Russia was without a monarch.
- Replacing the Tsar in 1917, the Provisional Government promised a constituent assembly, free elections, and economic improvements; however, it was also committed to maintaining Russia's involvement in the war. This was partly due to its composition, being made up of liberal and conservative elements of the old Duma, but also because foreign recognition of the new government hinged on its continuing support for the Allies.
- Despite the great hopes Russians initially had for the Provisional Government, its war policy alienated most of the nation as 1917 progressed. The Bolsheviks began to undermine its efforts, promoting mutiny on the front and socialist revolution in the cities using Lenin's catchy 'Peace! Bread! Land!'

### The ideas and ideologies used in revolutionary struggle

Revolutions need ideas to justify and to 'explain' events taking place, and all revolutions have, at certain stages, a range of different ideas about what should occur.

#### Marxism, socialism and communism

- Karl Marx, 1818–83, was a German Jew famous for his theories about history, society, economic status and political power. Marx suggested that all history is the history of 'class struggle': that classes are always in a state of tension as they try to improve their

- economic position. For the upper and middle classes this means seeking profit, wealth and capital; for the lower classes it means the struggle for better wages and conditions.
- Examining the rampant industrial capitalism of the 1800s, Marx focused on the exploitation of labour (workers) by those who own capital, or the 'means of production' (e.g. factories, machinery). In capitalism, the workers are 'wage slaves' while the bourgeoisie, or capital-owning middle-class, use profits to further increase their capital, and therefore continue the inequitable distribution of wealth.
- Marx envisaged a point where capitalism would develop and become so corrupt, exploitative and inequitable that it would collapse, leading to a revolution of the proletariat, or working class. The revolutionaries would then establish a 'dictatorship of the proletariat', a regime ruling in the interests of the working class to dismantle the old order. This phase of history would be called *socialism*.
- Eventually the institutions of society would be dismantled under socialism: classes would disappear, the state (institutions of government) would 'wither away', leading to a phase called *communism*. Marx's ideology was Utopian, that is it envisaged a perfect society in the future that many consider could not be achieved.

#### Marxist-Leninism or Bolshevism

- Lenin held true to most Marxist ideas; however, he adapted Marxism to suit the situation in Russia. This new synthesis of ideologies was called 'Marxist-Leninism'. The key difference between Lenin's theories and orthodox Marxism was that Lenin argued that the capitalist phase could be 'bypassed': socialist revolution could take place immediately in Russia rather than waiting for a capitalist-democratic period to develop, consolidate and collapse.
- While holding true to the fundamental ideas of Marxism, Lenin defended the need for ideological flexibility and stated on several occasions that he would adapt Marx's ideas to suit the unique political, social and economic circumstances in Russia.

### The role of revolutionary individuals and groups in bringing about change

#### The Bolsheviks and Mensheviks

- The first significant Marxist party in Russia was the Social Democratic Workers' Party, or SDs, formed by Lenin, Martov, Plekhanov and other key socialist figures.
- In 1903 the SDs split on issues of membership, method and tactic. The party divided into Mensheviks ('minority') and Bolsheviks ('majority'). The Mensheviks, led by Martov, favoured a gradual approach, working to achieve socialist improvements over time, as well as a broad party membership. The Bolsheviks, led by Lenin, prepared a 'revolutionary vanguard': a small group of professional revolutionaries, working in secret to achieve revolution as quickly as possible.
- These groups had many similar points of ideology and their beliefs often overlapped; however, the gap between them widened and they formally separated in 1912.

#### The Soviets

- The Soviets, democratically formed councils of workers and low-ranking military personnel, were important groups both in the events of 1905 and 1917. Formed and led by Trotsky in 1905, the St Petersburg Soviet was a key organiser of strikes and unrest before being repressed by force late that year.
- The Soviets re-formed shortly before the February 1917 revolution and played a critical role in undermining the Provisional Government and limiting its control of military, infrastructure and labour. Initially containing a majority of Social Revolutionaries (SRs), Bolshevik representation in the Soviets gradually increased throughout 1917, to the point where a Bolshevik majority allowed them to seize power (nominally on behalf of the Soviets) in October 1917.



### Vladimir Lenin, 1870–1924

- The dominant figure in the Bolshevik party, Lenin was born Vladimir Illich Ulyanov in Simbirsk, Russia, the son of a school's inspector. A successful student, quiet and diligent, Lenin acquired his political views from his brother Alexander (a member of the violent revolutionary group 'People's Will') as well as utopian writers like Chernyshevsky and Marx. In 1887 Alexander Ulyanov was executed for plotting to assassinate the Tsar; this was an influential event in Lenin's political development.
- Lenin studied law, completing his degree despite being expelled at one point for his radical political views. He aligned himself with fellow Marxists such as Martov, Plekhanov and his future wife, Krupskaya, whom he married in 1898. In that year the group formed the Social Democratic Labour Party (SDs), which was explicitly Marxist and aimed to overthrow Tsarism in Russia. In 1903 Lenin, who held different opinions about the best way to achieve change, prompted a split in the SDs and undertook leadership of the new Bolshevik faction.
- Lenin was active between 1905 and 1914 but had limited influence on the situation in Russia. He mostly lived abroad, writing revolutionary propaganda and texts. Unlike Trotsky he played virtually no part in the 1905 revolution, and although Bolshevik propaganda helped undermine Tsarism, Lenin had little input in the February 1917 revolution. He returned to Russia in April of that year, calling for an immediate transition from the Provisional Government to a socialist regime.
- With the Provisional Government in power and continuing Russia's involvement in World War One, Lenin led the Bolsheviks on a propaganda campaign aimed at undermining the war effort, promoting mutiny and desertion, and encouraging dissent in the powerful city-based Soviets. These Soviets would become his route to revolution, Lenin naming them as the 'only possible form of government' and calling for 'all power to the Soviets!'

### Leon Trotsky, 1879–1940

- Trotsky came from the middle class, the son of Russian-Jewish parents. Like Lenin he was a member of the SDs; however, he sided with the Mensheviks after the split in 1903. He did not join the Bolsheviks until 1917, although he had sometimes supported Lenin and Bolshevik ideas in his writings prior to that time.
- Unlike most Bolsheviks, Trotsky was a pivotal figure in the failed 1905 revolution, helping to form and then lead the St Petersburg Soviet; he was also chairman of the Petrograd Soviet during 1917.
- A superb military organiser and tactician, the success of the October 1917 revolution can largely be attributed to Trotsky. As chairman of the MRC (Military Revolutionary Committee), he was responsible for tactical and logistic organisation of the coup that swept the Bolsheviks to power.
- Trotsky became Commissar for Foreign Affairs after the October revolution and was the main negotiator at the Brest-Litovsk negotiations; like Lenin he was an internationalist who considered that world revolution was imminent, so his approach to negotiations was bold and aggressive, believing that 'losses' would eventually be retained.
- In 1918 Trotsky was appointed Commissar for War. He abandoned the idea of militia-style Bolshevik units and instead pushed for a more professional Red Army, controversially using ex-Tsarist officers to implement rigid discipline into the army. Using conscription, political commissars and propaganda, Trotsky moulded the Red Army into a cohesive force that was able to withstand the threat of White counter-revolution during the Civil War (1918–21).
- The logical successor to Lenin as party leader, Trotsky was politically isolated and therefore failed to garner support within the party after Lenin's death. Outmanoeuvred by Stalin, he was exiled from Russia in 1926.

### Alexandra Kollontai, 1872–1952

- Kollontai's role in the Bolshevik party is testament to its initial commitment to the idea of sexual equality, but her own abilities and effort enabled her to rise to a prominent position in the party's administration.
- Kollontai had only a basic education and married young. She left her husband and undertook charity work among Russia's poor and industrial working class during the 1890s. At that time she read several Marxist works, her experiences giving her a personal insight into Marx's theories of exploitation. Kollontai eventually became a member of the SDs.
- The party split in 1903 but Kollontai was unsure which faction to join, so she offered her services to both the Bolsheviks and Mensheviks. Unhappy with Lenin's approach, she joined the Mensheviks in 1906 but left and aligned herself with the Bolsheviks in 1915, taking part in the October 1917 revolution.
- One of several women in the Bolshevik administration, Kollontai was appointed Commissar for Social Welfare and helped establish the Commission for Agitation and Propaganda Among Working Women. Despite her position in the party she did not enjoy a good relationship with Lenin: she was critical of party policy and bureaucracy, and formed an opposing faction within the party structure.
- Kollontai is often referred to as the 'conscience of the Bolsheviks' because she was openly critical of their disregard and treatment of the workers whom they claimed to represent. She was a staunch feminist and advocated more sexual freedom for women, and marriage based on love rather than property or status.

### Other important figures in the revolution

- **Alexander Kerensky, 1881–1970**, came from the same home town as Lenin and was to eventually vie with him for power in 1917. A member of the SRs, ambitious and a gifted orator, Kerensky was the only socialist in the new Provisional Government. He rose to become war minister and eventually prime minister (July 1917) as the Provisional Government struggled to cope with the war, revolutionary activity and the popularity and strength of the Soviets. Kerensky's mishandling of the Kornilov affair in August 1917 was a costly factor in the fall of the Provisional Government.
- **Nikolai Bukharin, 1888–1938**, was a key Bolshevik and a close ally of Lenin prior to the revolution. He was editor of *Pravda* ('Truth') in 1918 but resigned in protest at the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk, believing that the new regime should expand the war to create an international communist revolution around Europe. He was a member of Comintern (Communist International) and the Politburo, supporting the New Economic Policy (NEP) and gradual economic change. He was arrested and executed on Stalin's orders on false charges of counter-revolutionary activity.
- **Feliks Dzerzhinsky, 1877–1926**, was a Polish nobleman who became one of the revolution's most fanatical Bolsheviks. After playing a key role in the October 1917 revolution, Dzerzhinsky was appointed leader of the Cheka in December and became known as an incorruptible and ruthless commander. He formed concentration camps to house potential counter-revolutionaries and kulaks and did not hesitate to order torture, executions and massacres as tools of revolutionary policy. He later became commissar for internal affairs and transport in the new regime.
- **Nadezhda Krupskaya, 1869–1939**, was Lenin's wife but also a key figure in the Bolshevik party. She met Lenin while teaching and remained with him, both in Russia and in exile, for the rest of his life, assisting in his revolutionary writings and with the editing of *Iskra* ('Spark'). Although she opposed Lenin's calls for an early socialist revolution in 1917, she eventually supported it, later becoming Deputy Commissar for Enlightenment and Education.
- **Josef Stalin, 1879–1953**, was a minor figure during the revolutionary period, often in exile in Siberia for his political activity; however, with the decline of Lenin's health, he amassed considerable power in the Bolshevik party. Originally engaged in armed robbery to fund the party, Stalin later went on to be one of the first editors of *Pravda*. He



was given the seemingly unimportant job of General Secretary, but used it to gradually build his own influence. Lenin's testament said that he was 'too rude' to lead the party; yet after Lenin's death Stalin successfully outmanoeuvred Trotsky to effectively become leader of the USSR.

## Key information

Key individuals	Key groups	Key documents	Key concepts
Nicholas II, Alexandra, Rasputin Stolypin, Witte Lenin Trotsky Kerensky	Social Democrats (SDs) Social Revolutionaries (SRs) Bolsheviks Mensheviks The Soviets Liberal groups, e.g. Kadets	Father Gapon's 'Bloody Sunday' petition Nicholas II's October Manifesto Marx's Communist Manifesto Lenin's <i>What is to be done?</i> Lenin's April Thesis	Autocracy Divine right monarchy Representation Marxism

## 2. Creating a new society

Before coming to power, Lenin and the Bolsheviks had formulated grand plans for implementing socialism and improving life for the proletariat – now they had the opportunity to put their theory into practice. However, aside from some early edicts that proved popular, they found creating a new society difficult (as revolutionaries usually do). They had seized power relatively easily, from a weak and crippled government; it wasn't apparent that they had widespread support, especially outside Petrograd. They faced opposition both inside and outside the country. After years of intense war the economy was exhausted, infrastructure was destroyed, and the people were demoralised. Reshaping Russia into a socialist state was not going to be easy ... This Area of Study considers exactly how difficult it was and what responses the Bolsheviks devised.

## Chronology of key events

Date	Event	Significance
Nov. 1917	Initial decrees on land and peace	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>All private land was confiscated and placed into the hands of the peasants, affirming previous land seizures.</li> <li>Peace was to be sought immediately.</li> </ul>
Nov. 1917	Sovnarkom established by decree	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Sovnarkom effectively became the executive government with Lenin as chairman.</li> <li>In theory the Sovnarkom represents the Soviets, but allows Lenin to rule by decree.</li> </ul>
Dec. 1917	Elections for the Constituent Assembly commence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Bolsheviks permitted scheduled elections for the Constituent Assembly to proceed, against Lenin's wishes.</li> <li>The results show a clear majority for the Social Revolutionaries (SRs).</li> </ul>
Dec. 1917	Formation of the Cheka	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The All-Russian Extraordinary Commission to Combat Counter-Revolution, Sabotage and Speculation (Cheka) was a secret police given extra-legal powers.</li> <li>It became an agent of terror.</li> </ul>
January 1918	Outbreak of Civil War in Russia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A combination of non-Bolshevik Russians and foreign troops joined forces to oust the party.</li> <li>Bolshevik reforms were put on hold while they fought for their political survival.</li> </ul>
January 1918	Constituent Assembly met and was dissolved on Lenin's order	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The Assembly condemned Bolshevik seizure of power and after sitting for just one day was forcibly dissolved by troops on Lenin's order, highlighting his intolerance for democracy or alternative parties.</li> </ul>
March 1918	Treaty of Brest-Litovsk signed	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Lenin's desire for peace at any cost resulted in surrender of vital resources, industries and regions. A quarter of Russia's population lived in these regions so were therefore lost.</li> </ul>

Date	Event	Significance
May 1918	War communism implemented	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>This was a policy of supplying the war effort through grain requisitioning, using force and terror if needed.</li> </ul>
July 1918	Tsar and his family executed	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A radical act that highlighted Bolshevik fears about the possible success of counter-revolution if a focal point for it remained in place.</li> </ul>
August–Sept. 1918	Lenin called for 'war on kulaks' and launched the Red Terror	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The kulaks were seen as counter-revolutionary conspirators or capitalists, so Lenin ordered their eradication.</li> <li>These policies highlighted Lenin's willingness to use terror.</li> </ul>
March 1919	Comintern (Communist International) established	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The (Third) Communist International was aimed at promoting world revolution.</li> <li>It was ostensibly international but modelled on Soviet government and ideology.</li> </ul>
February 1921	Peasant rebellions and strikes, ending with Kronstadt revolt	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>These events represented not only a decline or absence of support for the Bolshevik regime, but direct opposition to it. Bolshevik authority was in danger of a further revolution.</li> </ul>
March 1921	Lenin announced New Economic Policy (NEP)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Petty capitalism and trade of surplus goods was permitted, while Bolsheviks retained control of 'commanding heights'.</li> <li>This policy is seen by the Left as a betrayal of socialist ideology.</li> </ul>
March 1922	Lenin ordered assault on the Church	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>This policy was a logical continuation of Marxist ideology, dismantling the structures of religion ('the opiate of the masses'); however, this further alienated many sections of the peasantry.</li> </ul>
January 1924	Death of Lenin	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Lenin had been incapacitated since late 1922, and his death left the party in limbo: no clear plan for either economic reconstruction or a replacement leader had been established.</li> </ul>

## The contribution of individuals and groups to the creation of a new society

It is one thing to push for revolution and to achieve it, but another thing altogether to consolidate power, deal with immediate crises and reshape the new society according to your revolutionary ideals. The new regime was shaped not only by Lenin's flawed theory and flawed Bolshevik planning, but also by the abysmal social and economic state of Russia at the time.

### The Bolsheviks

- In 1918 the party renamed itself the All-Russian Communist Party, as it began to become less a party of the workers, and more a party of officials and 'professional revolutionaries' (Lenin's 'revolutionary vanguard'). They moved the Russian capital to Moscow in March 1918.
- It is easy to think of the Bolsheviks as merely a collective extension of Lenin's political will; it is certainly true that he was the most influential individual within the party. However, in reality the Bolsheviks were quite an ideologically and politically diverse organisation; there was discussion, debate and division over many important issues. Factions were formed during 1920, led by figures such as Kollontai, though they were quickly declared illegal by Lenin.

### Lenin

- Lenin was a key source of revolutionary ideas up to and during 1917, so it was almost natural that the Bolsheviks should rely on him in the new regime. The rest of Russia, being accustomed to having political power vested in an individual, also looked to Lenin as the embodiment of the new society.
- Lenin was a dominant figure within the Bolshevik party structure but this did not always go unquestioned. He pushed through some resolutions through sheer force of personality and by threatening to resign. For instance, the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk (signed March 1918) was passed in this manner by only a one-vote majority.



## Trotsky

- Trotsky was a critical figure in the consolidation and restructuring of the new society. Lenin relied on his intelligence, and his tactical, organisational and military experience in key events such as the October revolution, the Civil War and the Kronstadt uprising. Trotsky held the important offices of War Commissar and Commissar for Foreign Affairs, as well as being an important member of the Politburo. Trotsky also remained an important Bolshevik writer and thinker, regularly contributing to party texts and propaganda.

## The cause of difficulties or crises faced by the new government

### The lack of support

- The takeover in October was essentially a coup rather than a popular uprising, so Lenin, aware of this, called an immediate Congress of Soviets in order to give the new Bolshevik regime a legitimate democratic basis. Members of this Congress were elected, and while some opposed Bolshevik rule, a majority affirmed support for the Bolsheviks, giving them some legitimacy as the new rulers of Russia.
- However, despite creating the illusion of a democratic Soviet government, Lenin also set about separating the Bolshevik elite from the Soviets. The Sovnarkom was established as an executive cabinet, in control of government departments, all managed by key Bolsheviks. Lenin became chairman of Sovnarkom, which over time came to act independently of the Soviets and their democratic processes.
- While the Bolsheviks enjoyed majority support in the urban Soviets it was unclear whether this was also the case throughout Russia. Elections for the new Constituent Assembly had been scheduled for December 1917, and while Lenin didn't want the elections held, pressure from moderates within the party forced him to allow them to proceed.
- The Bolsheviks, despite some hope of a majority, won only 175 out of 707 seats in the assembly, with around 58 per cent of seats won by the SRs. The Constituent Assembly met in January 1918, sitting for one day, pledging to act independently and electing a member of the SRs as its president.
- These events suggest that support for the Bolsheviks, while strong in the Soviets, was not widespread elsewhere. This is hardly surprising: the Bolsheviks had always been associated with the industrial workers, a small percentage of the population, while those in rural areas much preferred the SRs, which had promoted a peasant-based form of socialism.

## World War One, 1914–18

- Ending Russia's involvement in World War One was a Bolshevik priority. This needed to be achieved quickly, as the October revolution had caused retreats and the breakdown of military discipline, leading to rapid German advances into Russian territory.
- Peace negotiations began, led by Trotsky, who tried stalling the process while Bolshevik agitators worked inside Germany and the German army in order to spark a socialist revolution (it was widely believed by leading Bolsheviks that Germany would be the next country to undergo revolution).
- The Germans proposed a peace treaty with massive costs and considerable humiliation for Bolshevik Russia. These included billions of roubles in reparations, surrender of about a third of Russia's territories in Europe as well as demobilisation and disarmament of the Russian military.
- Even Bolsheviks desperate for peace recognised the social and economic dangers of signing such a costly treaty. The more extreme Left of the Bolsheviks favoured continuing the war as a revolutionary conflict, hoping to incite socialist uprising in Germany.

- Lenin and Trotsky, realising that the state was too weak in early 1918 to continue war with Germany, urged the signing of the costly Treaty of Brest-Litovsk despite strong opposition from within the Bolshevik party. Lenin's threats to resign forced their approval, though with only a one-vote majority.

## Civil War, 1918–21

- Directly after the October revolution the new regime faced hostile opposition from a variety of elements: those loyal to the Tsarist regime; military divisions; conservative land-owners; foreign troops inside Russia 'left over' from World War One; liberals who felt democracy had been 'stolen'; and more moderate socialists who had been swept aside by the Bolshevik takeover.
- The Civil War was driven mainly by military units led by conservative commanders such as General Kornilov, General Denikin and Admiral Kolchak. All were bitterly opposed to socialism, and formed counter-revolutionary armies with the aim of overthrowing regional Bolshevik control. Though they had no central organisation, they became collectively known as the 'Whites'.
- Other socialists reacted negatively to the Bolshevik revolution, though more by forming breakaway self-governing regions than by mobilising armies. The SRs were particularly active in this regard, though they often faced opposition not only from the Bolshevik Red Army but also anti-socialist White Army divisions.
- Foreign troops were integral to prolonging the Civil War. Many nations sent troops into Russia to support the Whites, for different reasons. The British and French sent in units on ideological and economic grounds, being opposed to socialism and aiming to protect investments inside Russia. The Japanese sent in troops hoping to gain territory, while some nationalist groups like the Poles hoped to gain both territory and independence.
- The Bolsheviks never gained full control of Russia in 1917 and the Whites were able to exploit this, winning control of rural, regional and outlying areas while the Bolsheviks were left to defend their strongholds in the cities and industrial areas.

## Economic issues

- Lenin and the Bolsheviks wrestled with economic problems from the October revolution onwards. Marx's theory of socialist revolution presupposed that it would occur in a rich industrial capitalist society that had reached its limits of growth; Russia, however, was only partly capitalist, predominantly agricultural and devastated by years of war.
- Given the political and military opposition to socialist rule that formed quickly in 1917–18, the Bolsheviks had little time to consolidate or strengthen the economy.

## Dissent and rebellion

- After taking power Lenin grappled with the problem of kulaks: peasants who through trade of surplus goods were more wealthy than other peasants. Lenin believed that kulaks achieved their wealth by hoarding grain, waiting for prices to rise, then selling their stored grain at a profit. The kulaks were consequently seen as traitors and enemies of the revolution.
- The most notable opposition to the Bolshevik regime came from soldiers and sailors at the Kronstadt base in 1921. Initially strong supporters of the Bolsheviks, the Kronstadters had been integral to socialist activity in both 1905 and 1917. Trotsky had once called them 'heroes of the revolution'.
- The Kronstadt uprising called for a relaxation of political censorship, greater participation and democratic processes in government, and economic improvements; they called for 'Soviets without Bolsheviks' and issued a petition of demands.



## The response of the key revolutionaries to the difficulties encountered

### The lack of support

- Early Bolshevik edicts were aimed at both winning the support of Russians and delivering on Lenin's pre-revolutionary promises. The Decree on Land ended private ownership and placed land into the hands of the peasants (they had been seizing it by force in the months prior, so this edict really just affirmed their possession of land). The Peace Decree pledged immediate negotiation of peace, while other decrees implemented social improvements for women.
- Lenin's response to the failure of the Bolsheviks to win a majority in the Constituent Assembly, as well as to signs of dissent and the presence of elements in the Assembly that were outside Bolshevik control on its first day of sitting, was to close it using force. He declared all non-socialist parties illegal and placed restrictions on political publications and the press.
- The Cheka (full title: All-Russian Extraordinary Commission to combat Counter-Revolution, Sabotage and Speculation) was established as a body committed to dealing with opponents of the new regime, rather than as a means of winning support. Under the control of the fanatical Polish Bolshevik Dzerzhinsky, the Cheka was charged with identifying, tracking down and dealing with counter-revolutionaries, agitators, vocal dissenters, spies and traitors.
- Faced with social division during the Civil War, an intense propaganda campaign was undertaken by the Bolshevik regime, for example, the use of agitprop cinematic and theatrical performances as well as pro-Bolshevik posters.

### World War One, 1914–18

- Trotsky was in charge of negotiating an end to Russia's war with Germany. He was an aggressive negotiator who manoeuvred for a superior outcome, despite Russia's fragile military and political state in early 1918. He stalled, antagonised and argued with the German delegation, hoping that Bolshevik agents inside the German army would provoke mutiny and desertion, and perhaps even socialist revolution.
- The Germans quickly became tired of Trotsky's stalling, however, and in February 1918 ended the ceasefire and launched a fresh offensive inside Russia. The Bolshevik government fled Petrograd and moved to Moscow. Meanwhile, within the party, Lenin threatened to resign if the Central Committee did not accept a peace treaty 'at any cost'. Lenin's resolution was passed with a majority of just one vote.
- The Treaty of Brest-Litovsk was signed in March 1918, officially ending war between Russia and Germany but at great cost: Russia was forced to surrender many heavily populated regions in Poland, the Ukraine, the Baltic states and Finland. These regions provided over forty per cent of national revenue and were critical sources of oil and food.
- Lenin and Trotsky were both internationalists, so believed that socialist revolution in Germany was imminent; therefore, any territory or resources ceded to Germany would only be a 'temporary loss' and would be regained when the international revolution was underway. When this failed to eventuate, the surrender of these critical food-growing regions would be an important factor in Russia's parlous economic condition.

### Civil War, 1918–21

- In January 1918 a Bolshevik decree created the Red Army in order to battle the White counter-revolutionary forces and protect the new regime. Trotsky was appointed as Commissar of Military and Naval Affairs, effectively becoming war minister.
- Trotsky introduced conscription in April in order to give the army a strong proletarian base, yet he also relied on the experience of former Tsarist officers, whose loyalty was ensured by threats and detention of their families, as well as close monitoring by loyal Bolshevik commissars.

- At its height in 1920, the Red Army had around five million soldiers. Unity, superior organisation, strict military discipline and loyalty to revolutionary principles were integral to the success of the Red Army in the Civil War, each soldier taking the *Oath of the Red Warrior*.
- The Cheka was instrumental in suppressing opposition to the Bolshevik cause during the Civil War, tracking down, exposing and punishing real or potential counter-revolutionary groups and individuals. The Cheka openly used fear and terror to ensure loyalty to the regime, killing thousands of suspected opponents and arresting almost one million.
- Bolshevik use of propaganda was intense and effective. Lenin consistently maintained that the war was one of foreign intervention and manipulation, while suggesting that victory to the Whites would only result in the reinstatement of the old regime. The Whites, never a unified force, failed to promote themselves as a viable alternative government for all Russians.
- Supplying the Red Army and the war effort, particularly given the exhausted state of Russia after World War One and the costly Treaty of Brest-Litovsk, would become a critical issue for the Bolsheviks (see 'Economic issues' below).

### Economic issues

- 'Land' and 'Bread' were two of Lenin's three revolutionary promises in 1917, both of which were economic in nature. The first was important because the peasantry comprised over eighty per cent of the population and a successful land policy might determine their support for a Bolshevik regime. The issue of improving bread and food supply was critical, however, as it was the direct cause of revolution in February 1917.
- The Bolshevik response to the issue of land was to issue a *Decree on Land* in November 1917, which borrowed heavily from the policy of the SRs. The decree abolished private ownership of land forever, all land passing to the collective ownership of the people; the people were free to work land on an equal basis, without restriction or tenure; land allocation would be decided by local villages or communes.
- In reality this decree was not radical and just affirmed what had been taking place throughout Russia in 1917. Peasant mobs and villagers who had been involved in revolts and uprisings had been actively seizing land from landlords; the Bolshevik land decree merely legitimised these acts and encouraged them elsewhere.
- The issue of food supply proved more difficult to address. The draining effect of World War One on food stores and peasant labour, as well as a poor harvest in 1917, made it difficult for the Bolsheviks to increase food production.
- Because the socialist agenda despised private property and capital, these concepts were nominally abolished in the new regime. All banks were nationalised and placed under the control of a state bank. Foreign factories, companies and their holdings in Russia were also nationalised and became the property of the Soviet state.
- Immediately after the October revolution Lenin called for a transitional economic policy called 'state capitalism', where the new socialist nation would take ownership of capital but would continue to rely on the experience of bourgeois managers while the economy was revived.
- The Civil War created new and pressing economic problems such as the urgency of feeding and supplying the Red Army. The Russian economy was still drained after years of global war, revolution and a costly treaty with the Germans, so its production levels were already low. Faced with their own annihilation the Bolsheviks responded with 'war communism', basically a policy of forced requisitioning of grain, terror and conscription.
- War communism facilitated victory in the Civil War but it was an unmitigated disaster in terms of its social effects. Forced grain requisitioning left peasants with little or nothing and millions – perhaps as many as ten million – starved to death. The Bolshevik regime was embarrassingly forced to accept foreign food aid from Britain and the USA in 1920–21, so bad were the conditions of millions of Russian peasants.



- After the Kronstadt uprising (1921) Lenin recognised that an easing of Bolshevik economic policy was needed; if the people weren't given some 'breathing space' they might be driven towards a third revolution. The NEP was implemented in 1921, ironically including some of the changes sought in the Kronstadt sailors' petition. The NEP would mark a point of ideological compromise in the new society and cause division and debate, both at the time and long after Lenin's death.
- The basis of the NEP was 'state-controlled capitalism': peasants were permitted to engage in petty trade with surplus grain and goods, while the state retained control of the economy's 'commanding heights' such as banking and heavy industry. This relaxation of communist principles injected a profit motive into agriculture and small industry; productivity increased, grain harvests improved and wages subsequently rose. The NEP was an economic success but an ideological retreat.

### Dissent and rebellion

- A policy of coercion and terror was launched against the kulaks. In August 1918 Lenin issued a 'hanging order': 100 kulaks were to be executed and their bodies displayed as a deterrent. The Cheka was charged with eradicating the kulaks as a class; this was stepped up during the Civil War and war communism when the supply of grain was even more vital. Some peasants opposed to forced requisitioning even burned their stored grain and healthy animals so they would not be seized by the Cheka or Red Army.
- The rebellion at Kronstadt in 1921 was a distinct threat to the Bolshevik regime, so Lenin responded with immediate force, sending a Red Army brigade of 60 000 troops to surround the Kronstadt garrison. On March 17 the Red Army, led by Trotsky, attacked across the ice, dispersing the rebels who mostly fled to Finland. Over 2000 rebels were shot by the Red Army.
- The events at Kronstadt were quickly explained by Lenin and Trotsky as potential counter-revolution by a group that was unreliable and easily influenced. This propaganda masked the lessons that were really learned by the Bolsheviks: that the new regime was in peril if it did not relax some of the demands placed on the people.

## The compromise of revolutionary ideals

### Political ideals

- To what extent you consider Bolshevik political ideals were compromised depends on what you consider them to be. Marx, Lenin and other socialist writers never described the 'dictatorship of the proletariat' to be a democratic or populist phrase; consequently Bolshevik actions such as the closure of the Constituent Assembly and the Red Terror can be considered legitimate components of 'class war'. However, some individuals, like Kollontai, considered the Bolsheviks to be representative of a broader workers' movement; therefore, policy should have better reflected the needs and interests of the workers.
- The Bolsheviks would come to rely on methods similar to those of the Tsarist regime that it replaced. The Cheka was much larger and more open in its coercive activities than the Okhrana had been; the closure of the Constituent Assembly after one day was far less tolerant than the Tsar's treatment of the Dumas; having delivered peace from World War One, the Bolsheviks then launched into a defensive war to protect their own position. These comparisons and others suggest that Soviet Russia was more politically autocratic than Tsarism had been.
- Lenin's outlook as a believer in international revolution was also compromised, leading him to become more concerned with the survival of the Bolshevik regime inside Russia. Socialist revolution did indeed break out in parts of Germany but was soon overcome by right-wing reactionaries. Lenin's earlier talk of self-determination – freedom and independence for regions and ethnic groups, should they vote for it – also shifted as territory and resources became critical to the Bolsheviks' survival.

### Economic ideals

- Lenin called for 'Peace! Bread! Land!' on his return to Russia in April 1917 but, once in power, he found the 'bread' element difficult to deliver. The Bolsheviks had no effective responses to the economic destitution of Russia during this period. When the Civil War erupted in 1918, feeding the people became a lower priority than Bolshevik survival.
- The major ideological crisis of the new regime was the NEP, which marked a partial retreat from socialist economics and an embracing of aspects of capitalism. After years of socialist propaganda, talk of revolutionary momentum and aggression against profit-seeking kulaks, the NEP seemed a regressive and hypocritical step.

### Social ideals

- Bolshevik social ideals were compromised more by the effects of economic policy and their use of force than anything else. It is difficult to defend a regime that claimed to act in the social interest when it caused, through its policy of war communism, the death of up to ten million Russian peasants during the famines of 1920–21. Similarly its use of violence, terror, extra-legal punishment and coercion – not always against so-called class enemies – marked a betrayal of the revolution's promise to protect and act on behalf of the lower classes.

## The changes and continuities that the revolution brought about

### The structure of government

- Government in the new regime was strongly influenced by the Bolshevik party structure prior to the revolution. Lenin's conception of the new government was that it should resemble Marx's 'dictatorship of the proletariat'. However, he was initially reluctant to disassociate the Bolsheviks from the popular Soviets, so he structured a government that appeared to represent the Soviets but in reality meant Bolshevik control. The Sovnarkom was created as an executive branch of Soviet government but in reality was filled with key Bolsheviks, basically allowing Lenin to rule by decree.
- Lenin also organised the Bolshevik party itself into three branches. The Politburo would be responsible for policy, the Orgburo would organise the party, and the Secretariat would delegate and appoint individuals to conduct party business. The party changed its name in 1918 to the Russian Communist Party.
- In March 1919 the (Third) Communist International, or Comintern, was established in Moscow. Proposed as a body to discuss, promote and organise world revolution, it consisted of delegates from all nations and thus was considered to be truly international. However, it was modelled on Soviet structures and procedures: it was soon dominated by Bolshevik party figures.

### Social organisation and values

- Early decrees implemented universal suffrage: all people over the age of eighteen were entitled to vote, regardless of wealth, gender or status. Over eighty million Russians were entitled to vote in the December 1917 elections for a constituent assembly (though only about a quarter actually did vote).
- The status of women was rapidly improved: they were given rights to equal pay, as well as the same legal status as men in terms of property ownership and in criminal matters. Women and men had equal rights in divorce, crèches were established for working women, while abortion and contraception were both legalised.
- Education was to become a feature of the new society. The responsibility for education now lay with the state rather than family or the Church. The Bolsheviks also committed themselves to ending illiteracy, and sent teams of party educators into rural areas; however, this scheme had only limited success initially, due to the distraction of civil war and economic crisis.



- The Bolsheviks began the deconstruction of the Russian Orthodox Church, nationalising its lands and assuming control of its schools. Separation of church and state was undertaken, with roles previously filled by the Church, such as registration of births, deaths, marriages and divorces, assumed by the government.
- The destruction of bourgeois culture was undertaken, replaced by what would eventually become known as 'socialist realism': the promotion of the worker and the successes of socialism, in art, literature, dance, drama and other cultural expressions.
- The calendar was overhauled. The old Julian calendar, until then retained because of the insistence of the Church, was replaced by the modern Gregorian calendar used elsewhere in Europe.

### Key information

Key individuals	Key groups	Key documents	Key concepts
Lenin Trotsky  Others to consider: Dzerzhinsky, Kolchak, Denikin	Bolsheviks (Russian Communist Party 1918–) Soviets Whites Red Army Cheka	Bolshevik edicts of November 1917 Lenin's 'hanging order' for the kulaks, 1918 Lenin's orders given during Civil War, 1918–21 Petition of the Kronstadt sailors, 1921 Lenin's justification of the NEP, 1921	Red Terror Kulaks War Communism New Economic Policy (NEP) Marxist-Leninism

### Glossary of terms specific to the Russian Revolution

<b>Bolshevik</b>	Meaning 'majority', the Bolsheviks were a radical political group formed in 1903
<b>Cheka</b>	Bolshevik secret police; an instrument of terror and suppression of counter-revolution
<b>Commissar</b>	Government minister or party representative
<b>Communism</b>	Ideology with the goal of a classless society
<b>Duma</b>	Russian national representative assembly formed in 1906
<b>Menshevik</b>	Meaning 'minority', the Mensheviks were an orthodox Marxist group formed in 1903
<b>Narodnik</b>	Russian for 'the people', a broad term for populist revolutionary movements of the 1800s
<b>Okhrana</b>	Repressive and counter-revolutionary secret police under Tsarism
<b>Proletariat</b>	All working classes and labouring people, e.g. factory workers, peasant farmers
<b>Socialism</b>	Ideology where workers' representatives seize power and rule on behalf of the proletariat
<b>Soviet</b>	Councils of workers, soldiers and sailors first formed in 1905
<b>SDs</b>	Social Democratic Workers' Party, a Marxist group formed in 1898 that split in 1903
<b>SRs</b>	Social (or Socialist) Revolutionaries, a broad left-wing revolutionary group
<b>Tsar</b>	Russian emperor (also spelt 'czar')
<b>Tsarina</b>	Russian empress; wife of the tsar
<b>Tsarévitch</b>	Heir to the Russian throne; the tsar's eldest son
<b>Zemstvo</b>	Local government council, responsible for social policies, e.g. education

### Internet locations for further revision



## Summary and historiography

### Key questions arising in relation to the Russian Revolution

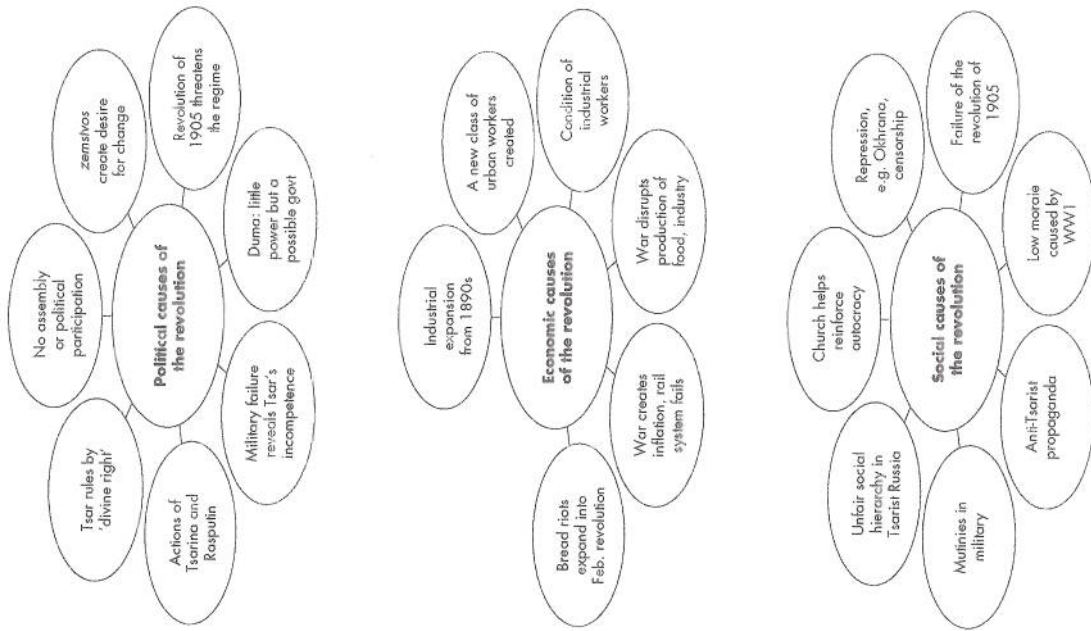
- **Did the Bolsheviks enjoy popular support?** Given that the October revolution was essentially an urban revolt, questions remain about how much support the Bolsheviks had among the peasantry and in rural areas. How valid are events such as the Constituent Assembly elections and the Kronstadt uprising as critical determinants of how much support the Bolsheviks truly had?
- **Was socialist revolution inevitable?** A question that relates to the timing of the Bolshevik revolution and examines the motives of and reasons given by its leaders, particularly Lenin. Did they genuinely consider the time for socialism to have arrived in October 1917? Or were they just impatient for power and change?
- **Can it be said that 'communism doesn't work'?** A suggestion made by right-wing historians and modern commentators is that communism is a flawed ideology that cannot succeed in any context. They point to the death toll, violence, terror, famine and misery in Russia 1917–24 as evidence of the 'evils' of communism. Were these events really the logical outcome of Marxist ideology, or rather the economic circumstances in Russia at the time?
- **What are the different perspectives on the revolution?** Some historians see it as being an inevitable decline into dictatorship and terror, while others believe that Lenin's program might have succeeded but for incontrovertible obstacles and foreign intervention. Others view it as a movement of the people which, despite its death toll, had worthwhile goals and some limited but positive outcomes.

### Some significant historians and their perspectives

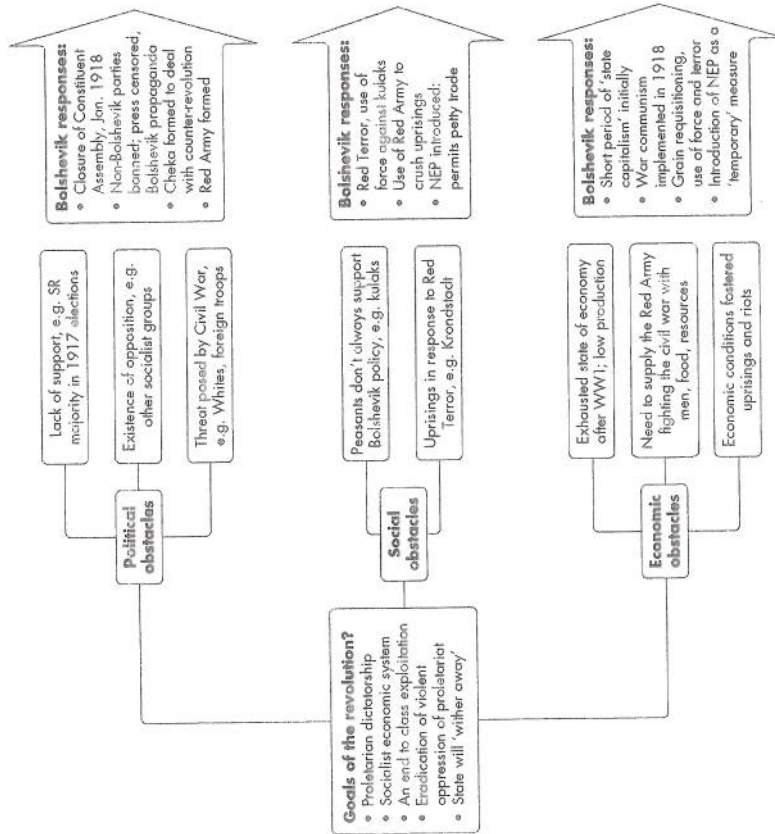
- Richard Pipes is a right-wing American historian who served as an advisor on the Soviet state to US presidential administrations during the Cold War period; it is not surprising, therefore, that his view of the Bolshevik revolution is profoundly negative. Pipes sees Lenin as an opportunistic dictator, the October revolution as unjustified and unsupported, and communism as a flawed and brutally interventionist ideology that could not succeed and had insufficient support from the Russian people.
- Orlando Figes is a liberal historian who, like Pipes, sees the revolution as a string of tragedies underpinned by the utopian impossibility of Marxism. Figes is less condemning of Lenin but nevertheless sees the Bolshevik leadership as either misguided or pig-headed in the pursuit of an unobtainable goal despite regular indications that it was not possible.
- Soviet and pro-Soviet historians, such as Trotsky, the American socialist John Reed and the Russian writer Dmitri Volkogonov have more positive perspectives on the revolution and its key figures, particularly Lenin who is idealistically presented as an almost flawless character. According to these historians, the Bolsheviks were truly representative of the proletariat and peasantry, and it was obstacles and opposition that led to the more unattractive outcomes of the revolution, not poor leadership.
- Revisionists such as Sheila Fitzpatrick and Robert Service have emerged in the past fifty or so years, taking new approaches to both the revolution and previous interpretations of it. Revisionists have focused less on leadership and broad political outcomes than other historians, preferring to examine individuals and microcosmic groups within some of the popular movements, for example, the Soviets, the unions, military units and peasant villages. Through examination of the ideas, motives and ambitions of those individuals and groups, they hope to construct a more precise and less stereotyped picture of the revolution as a movement of the people.

## Visual summary: Russian Revolution

### 1. Revolutionary ideas, leaders, movements and events



### 2. Creating a new society





## Russian Revolution in Dates

**1905 Jan** Bloody Sunday - Tsarist troops open fire on a peaceful demonstration of workers in St Petersburg.

**1905 October** General Strike sweeps Russia which ends when the Tsar promises a constitution.

**1905 December** In response to the suppression of the St Petersburg Soviet the Moscow Soviet organises a disastrous insurrection that the government suppresses after five days

**1906** The promised parliament, the Duma, is dissolved when it produces an anti government majority even though elected on a narrow franchise.

**1911-1914** A new wave of workers unrest ends with the outbreak of the First World War

**1917 Feb** After several days of demonstrations in Petrograd (formally St Petersburg) the government orders troops to open fire. The next day these troops mutiny. The Tsar abdicates when he hears that Moscow too has joined the Revolution. An agreement is reached between the Petrograd Soviet and the Provisional Government headed by Lvov.

**1917 March 12th** Abolition of the death Penalty

**1917 April 18th** Milyukov note. Milyukov tells allies that war aims unchanged.

**1917 April 20 - 21** The April Days. Opposition to the Foreign Minister Milyukov boils over due to his refusal to renounce annexations.

**1917 May** Milyukov resigns. Members of the Mensheviks and the Socialist Revolutionaries join the government.

**1917 June 3** First All-Russia Congress of Workers and Soldiers Soviets opens.

**1917 June 18** Offensive launched by Russia against Austria Hungary.

**1917 July The July Days.** (3rd and 4th) Workers and soldiers in Petrograd demand the Soviet takes power. Sporadic fighting results and the Soviet restores order with troops brought back from the front. Trotsky arrested. Lenin goes into hiding. A new provisional government is set up with Kerensky at its head (8th).

**1917 July 12th** Death Penalty reintroduced for the front.

**1917 Aug** The Kornilov putsch. An attempt by General Kornilov to establish a right wing dictatorship is a disastrous flop. Chernov the leader of the Socialist Revolutionaries resigns from the government denouncing Kerensky for complicity in the plot.

**1917 Sept** The Bolsheviks win control of the Petrograd Soviet.

In the countryside peasant seizure of land from the gentry continues and reaches the level of near insurrection in Tambov.

**1917 Oct** The Bolsheviks overthrow the Provisional government on the eve of the meeting of 2nd All-Russia Congress of Soviets.

**1917 26/27 Oct** Soviet proclamations on land and peace. Death Penalty abolished.

**1917 30 Oct** Kerensky repulsed outside Petrograd

**1917 2 Nov** Bolsheviks gain Moscow

**1917 7th Nov** Ukraine proclaimed independent by the Central Rada.

**1917 Nov 12-14** Elections to the Constituent Assembly. Socialist Revolutionaries the largest party.

**1917 12 Dec** Left-SRs join Sovnarkom

**1917 Dec (early)** Congress of Socialist Revolutionaries results in victory for the left under Chernov. Likewise Menshevik Congress gives victory to Martov's Menshevik internationalists.

**1918 Jan 5th** The Constituent Assembly in which the Bolsheviks are a minority meets for one day before being suppressed. Earlier that day a demonstration is fired on by Bolshevik units and several demonstrators are killed

**1918 10-18 Jan 3rd** Soviet Congress

**1918 Jan 28th** Trotsky denounces the German Peace Terms as unacceptable and walks out of the peace negotiations at Brest- Litovsk.

**1918 Feb 1/14** Russia adopts Western (Gregorian) calendar.

**1918 Feb 18th** The Germans invade Russia which is all but defenceless as virtually the entire army has deserted.

**1918 March** The Bolsheviks accept the dictated peace of Brest-Litovsk. The Left SRs denounce the peace and leave the government.

**1918 April 12th** Moscow headquarters of the anarchists surrounded and attacked by Bolshevik troops

**1918 May 9th** Bolshevik troops open fire on workers protesting at food shortages in the town of Kolpino

**1918 May (late)** The Czechoslovak legion mutinies against the Bolshevik government. Using the railways they are able to sweep away Bolshevik control from vast areas of Russia. The Socialist Revolutionaries support the rising.

**1918 July** Fifth Soviet Congress. The left SRs assassinate the German ambassador and are in turn crushed by the Bolsheviks.

**1918 16 July** Gorky's *Novaia Zhizn*, the last opposition paper, banned.

**1918 23rd Aug 3** ministers of the Siberian Government are arrested by supporter of Mikhailov, the finance Minister, when they arrive in Omsk. They are told to resign their posts. Two agree. The third, Novoselov, refuses and is hacked to death.

**1918 22nd Sept** Siberian Oblast Duma dismisses Mikhailov and is itself dispersed by Mikhailov

**1918 18th November** Kolchak, stages a coup against the Directory, the multi party government in Siberia, and establishes a counterrevolutionary despotism.

**1918 Dec** Perm falls to Kolchak's Whites

**1919 Jan** Mensheviks legalised and allowed to publish *Vsegda Vpered* in Moscow. Era of relative freedom begins in Bolshevik controlled Russia

**1919 25 Feb** The Cheka closes down *Vsegda Vpered*. This marks a return to despotic rule by Bolsheviks.

**1919** White Armies attack the Bolsheviks from all directions but the Red Army is finally victorious.

**1920 25 Apr** Poland invades Russia.

**1920 19th Aug** Start of peasant insurrection in Tambov

**1920 14 Nov.** Last White army under Wrangel evacuates the Crimea

**1921** Peasant unrest sweeps Russia. These risings are suppressed but the New Economic Policy is proclaimed that gives the peasants the right to sell their grain surpluses

**1921 1-17 Mar** The old Bolshevik stronghold of Kronstadt rises demanding free election to the Soviets but is suppressed.

**1921 May** Tambov insurrection suppressed

**1924** Lenin dies. Trotsky is defeated by a triumvirate of Stalin, Kamenev and Zinoviev. Though Stalin stays in the background it is he who is the real power as the other two will shortly discover.